

Chinese Soft Power in France. Panda Diplomacy

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>The objective of the study was to shed light on the Chinese soft power in France, and, in particular, on such a political tool as panda diplomacy. In the following thesis I am answering the research questions of the role the soft power is playing in the Chinese foreign policy aimed at France, what is its image in the news outlets and among readers of those articles, and how and when panda diplomacy is carried out.</p> <p>As the following thesis deals with the role of Chinese soft power in France, the information about the emergence and meaning of the term “soft power” is provided to the reader for a better understanding of the content. Moreover, the theoretical background of the concept of panda diplomacy itself, the development of the concept of “soft power” in China, the France-China Relationship, and the position of Chinese soft power in the world are presented in the paper.</p> <p>For the research, the articles and readers' comments retrieved from 3 different politically orientated news outlets (Le Monde, France 24, and Le Figaro) were used. A total of 15 newspaper articles and 286 readers' comments were analyzed.</p> <p>This Master thesis presents the research findings primarily based on the content analysis of reader comments and newspaper articles. The first finding is that soft power and panda diplomacy, as a tool, plays an important role to signify the positive China-France relationship and economic achievements between the two countries. Secondly, panda diplomacy has a controversial image in the French news outlets. Some news outlets are positively evaluating the practice, while others doubt it. The readers are mostly putting in negative comments accusing authorities of the unnecessary expenses of money for pandas. Lastly, Panda diplomacy is carried out to celebrate the economic achievements of its partner country. In France, according to the articles, the rental contracts of pandas were signed following the successful deals and supported by the government, Zoo facilities, foundations, and sponsors.</p>			
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Introduction

Nowadays people are surrounded by politics. We hear about it every day from television, social media, the Internet, colleagues, friends, and so forth. There are constant debates on international and national political actions, the first ones, however, sometimes seem to be prevalent. Countries are competing for power by peaceful or hostile means. Especially visible is the competition between the top five countries, which are seen to have the most influence: the United States of America, China, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany (Most Influential Countries, 2020). There are ups and downs in politics. Political situations can result in people's opinions and countries' reputations swiftly change. A special role in the modern world is played by soft power, which has become one of the key aspects of diplomacy. It allows countries to gain authority, ensure the successful results of their policy, and all this happens without using military force. Therefore, for China, which is constantly increasing its strength and influence on the international arena, soft power has become one of the most essential aspects of diplomacy. "Soft power has to make China's rise palatable to the world and has to create understanding, regard, and ultimately support for China's political model and policies" (d'Hooghe, 2011, p.1). Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu state in their book «China's Soft Power and International Relations» (2012, p.2) that modern scholars highlight four main soft power tools of the Chinese government. They include the participation of the country in encouraging political discourses, its strong diplomatic behaviour and self-control, cultural and public diplomacy, trade, and aid. Successful implementation of soft power techniques should lead to the creation of tight allies, promotion, and further development of the country. For example, positive results can already be seen through the economic development and the increased cultural exchange between China and the countries of the European Union. The evidence can be seen through numerous newspaper articles representing economic projects (e.g. the New Silk Road Initiative), cultural festivals, Chinese exhibitions abroad, an increased number of student exchanges between European countries and China, and so forth.

Therefore, it can be seen that "Europe is watching China and everybody — well informed or not— has an opinion about China" (d'Hooghe, 2011, p.1). However, these opinions vary a lot from one theme to another. Politics mostly have a negative connotation in European countries, while there is still a great interest, intrigue, and attraction on the part of Chinese culture. Therefore, it is exciting to see how the Chinese government is implementing soft

power techniques to achieve a better, more beneficial reputation and improve China's position in the international arena.

As stated in the title of the following thesis, I am going to concentrate on one particular Western European country – France. This country was chosen primarily because of its proactive participation in establishing foreign relations with China, tight economic and cultural connections and cooperation. To further develop the research topic the decision was taken to include in the project so-called “Panda diplomacy”, which, as a modern political tool, appeared in late 2011 - early 2012. This is a practice that pursues the goal of promoting animal preservation and biological research and can be seen as a symbolical political effort used by the Chinese government to win popularity in several foreign countries (Hartig, 2013). France is one of the few European countries, which was recently allowed to loan a panda, which now resides in the ZooParc de Beauval. The decision to connect the work to the phenomenon of Panda diplomacy was taken since it has not been widely discussed in the academic field. Most researchers are emphasizing the roles of student exchange programs and the role of Confucius institutes in terms of Chinese soft power, not touching the loans of pandas as a part of the country's soft power.

Objectives and research questions

The main aim of the research is to critically examine the use of soft power techniques by the Chinese government aimed at establishing more beneficial connections with France. Moreover, as previously stated in the introduction part, the case study on “panda diplomacy” will be included in the work to deepen the research focus and find the answers to some of the research questions stated below.

Throughout the research I will be answering the following questions:

Q1. What role is soft power playing in the Chinese foreign policy aimed at France?

Q2. What is the image of “panda diplomacy” as a part of the Chinese soft power policy in France? What is the attitude of the French people towards it?

Q3. When and how the so-called “Panda diplomacy” is carried out?

Defining “soft power”

Soft power has become one of the major forces of attraction and the most desired tool to be viewed in the international arena. This has happened mostly due to its peaceful nature. The term ‘soft power’ was popularized in the book “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power” (1990) by professor Joseph Nye. At first, in the 1980s, Nye defined the term in question as “the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion” (Ikenberry, 2004). According to him, soft power is based on three key aspects: culture, political values, and foreign policy (Nye, Jr., 2011). Since the 1980s, the definition of soft power has evolved into “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, Jr., 2019, p.1), where the supplementation of the term “payment” heated large discussions because money is necessary in conducting foreign policy, for example, cultural exchange programs.

While writing this paper I was using the first definition proposed by Nye as the basis. In other words, from my perspective, soft power represents a form of political power that presupposes the ability to achieve desired results based on voluntary participation, sympathy, and attractiveness, as opposed to “hard” power, which implies coercion. Soft power is used to facilitate cooperation within actors in the international arena and is a highly efficient tool to be used in the current uncertain and unstable geopolitical situation. The next part of the chapter, going deeper into the theme, intends to get an insight into how China’s soft power is perceived among international researchers in comparison with other countries.

Development of the concept “soft power” in China

Returning to the history of the concept of soft power and how it took its place in the political arena of China it is important to mention the article “Culture as National Power: Soft Power” by Wang Huning, Dean of the Faculty of International Relations of Fudan University, who is one of the top leaders of the Communist Party of China. The article discusses the term soft power and what it stands for. It was published in 1993 after the popularization of the term soft power by Nye and appeared to be the first publication in China on this topic.

In May 2004, during the 13th group study session of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party, two articles connected to the concept of soft power were published. The first article

aimed to advance the philosophy and social sciences in China and to discuss the Chinese model and the Beijing Consensus (Lai, 2012). The second article also defined soft power, as understood at that time by the Chinese government: soft power – “the international appeal and attraction of one nation’s culture, values, social system (or political system), and developmental model” (Lai, 2012, p.11). Moreover, it was stated in the article that Chinese authorities consider it essential to develop Chinese philosophy and social sciences.

The second article, named “China needs soft power”, touched upon important aspects on the subject of the rising influence of soft power in the international arena, and it is an important tool in the competition between countries (Lai, 2012). This justified the need for China to have its soft power to gain international recognition and respect. Moreover, the article pointed out that the traditional culture of the country should lay on the basis of this political tool. The United States of America were represented as the main competitor and obstacle in the way of expanding Chinese soft power.

These two articles created a foundation for soft power in China. Besides, they provided necessary basic guidelines to soft power, showed what the aims are, and highlighted what the difficulties are. They were a significant benchmark for the development of Chinese soft power, which revealed a part of the country's long-term diplomatic development. Moreover, it is fascinating to see how the ideas of the West, Nye's in particular, were implemented by the Chinese government in a very short timeframe to improve and further develop international policy.

After three years, in 2007, Party General Secretary and President Hu during his keynote speech to the Seventeenth Congress of the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emphasized culture gaining importance as a part of the national power (Assistant, 2016). He proclaimed that the party should emphasize the country’s history in terms of soft power and the improvement of the support of cultural rights and interests of the citizens.

Afterwards, during the 22nd group study session of the Chinese Politburo in July 2010, President Hu Jintao again repeated his points on the importance of culture for increasing the national power (Lai, 2012). Later that year, further increasing the importance of soft power, in October, the Central Committee of the CCP promulgated the Twelfth Five-Year Plan from 2011 to 2015. The 9th article of which touched upon soft power as an accumulation of the

elements of traditional culture, innovations, development of media, and export of cultural products.

Moreover, in January 2012, President Hu Jintao made a speech, which was later published as an article in Qiushi Magazine (Hu Jintao's Article in Qiushi Magazine – Translated, 2012). During the speech, Jintao—several times mentioned the term “soft power”. He claimed that previous reforms, the process of opening up the country's culture and developing “socialist culture with Chinese characteristics” led to a significant increase in the development of ideology, scientific culture and increase in moral qualities. They, in turn, contribute to the development of the country's population and the strengthening of soft power. Furthermore, he claimed that an already created solid basis and acquired experience should be highly beneficial for the future development of the country's culture. Additionally, Hu Jintao highlighted that cultural soft power, that is to say, the cultural component of soft power is playing an important role in increasing the competitiveness of the country, which is highly required for China to actively participate in the tough international competition.

Later, in 2013, the ideas of soft power were developed under the new General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party - Xi Jinping (CNPC, 2016). During the 12th session of the collective study of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, he outlined certain guidelines for the formation of a positive image of China abroad. Firstly, China should be associated with both ancient Eastern civilization and socialist values. Secondly, multinationalism, multiculturalism, historical traditions, a confident political course, social stability and cohesion, openness to the outside world, focus on economic development, passion, and aspiration for the future should be the key aspects which should be demonstrated to the outside world. The image of China as a responsible state that actively participates in solving global problems and upholds the principles of equality and justice, peace and development in the international arena should be created.

To pursue a policy of soft power related to culture, the Chinese government considers it necessary to use all possible channels: media, literature, cinema, exhibitions, schools, universities, research institutes, and so on. China decided to focus its cultural policy on a rich cultural heritage rather than on the modern culture of the masses since the latter looks less attractive (Albro, 2015). Another innovation of soft power used by China is its goal - to ensure the country's cultural sovereignty in relation to mainly Western cultures (Edney,

2015). However, it is important to note that China's soft power resources are by no means limited to traditional culture, they also expand on the economic, social, and political model.

One of the most significant methods of China's cultural policy is the creation of a network of Confucian institutions - centres for the development of language and culture abroad. The centres were opened by analogy with such linguistic and cultural centres of European countries as the Alliance Française, the Goethe and Cervantes Institutes. China in a short time outstripped its predecessors and reached the number of 548 Confucius Institutes in 2018 (Statista, 2019). This soft power tool was taken very critically by the United States and European countries, which felt that the expansion of Chinese culture became quite radical. Moreover, the People's Republic of China (the PRC) authorities are taking comprehensive measures aimed at accelerating the development of the cultural industry aimed at strengthening positions in the world cultural market. Following the 13th five-year plan of socio-economic development and the plan of the Ministry of Culture of the PRC for the development of the cultural industry for the period of the 13th five-year plan, by 2020 cultural production should become one of the main branches of the national economy (NADDC, 2019). Another method of the country's cultural policy is the export of educational services (Export of Education Is a Newly Developed Area in China, 2020), which has also been criticized by the public as being highly politicized. The third method which is important to list is the expansion of mass media and an introduction of a new, more flexible communication strategy that would make it possible to better consider the needs of foreign audiences. Not surprisingly this tool of cultural expansion is also being criticized as overly proactive. Therefore, it is interesting to see whether the panda diplomacy faces similar judgement as other cultural policies of China.

All discovered above shows the determination of the Chinese government to develop in the sphere of soft power. However, it can be seen that panda diplomacy, as a tool, has almost no mention in the common literature, and is not considered as a major instrument. Therefore, the next part of this thesis will concern panda diplomacy itself.

The Concept of Panda Diplomacy

“Panda diplomacy describes how the Chinese authorities let chosen governments keep pandas as a mark of respect between their countries” (Panda Diplomacy - What Is It? - CBBC Newsround, 2014).

The program on the negotiation of the Harvard Law School in 2020 has described the strategy or concept of panda diplomacy in the following words: “China has a long history of leasing or lending pandas (but never giving them away outright) to countries with which it hopes to build relations”. He also states in the article that panda diplomacy can be understood as one of the methods of soft power, which political scientist Joseph S. Nye, Jr., defined in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*” (PON Staff, 2020). Hence, panda diplomacy can be defined as the practice of borrowing giant pandas from China to other countries to enhance diplomatic relations by the means of soft power. Moreover, panda diplomacy also has the preservational and breeding function to support the population of this species in danger of extinction (Buckingham et al., 2013).

The Diplomat magazine, in 2017, has compared two soft power tools: Confucius Institutions and pandas, which, in contrast to the first, are incomparably more popular both by governments and zoos around the world by being the most attractive part of Chinese public diplomacy. The reason for the popularity of pandas pointed out in the article is that they are affecting people by causing positive emotions (Panda Diplomacy - What Is It?, 2014). Moreover, Hartig (2013 p.56) has as well highlighted the visually appealing identity of pandas as one of the key aspects of the success of this diplomatic tool.

Buckingham et al. (2013, p.262) in the article “Diplomats and Refugees: Panda Diplomacy, Soft “Cuddly” Power, and the New Trajectory in Panda Conservation” has proposed three phases of the development of panda diplomacy. The first one is the Mao era (the 1960s - 1970s) when China is using pandas as a gift for strategic partners. The second one started in 1978 when Deng Xiaoping’s rose to power (starting from 1978) and pandas became a form of a “gift” loan which was given to strategic economic partners of China (Buckingham et al., 2013, pp.262). The third one started after the damage of panda-conservation facilities in Chengdu in 2008 as the result of a serious earthquake. The third stage linked the happening loans of pandas with countries supplying China with resources and technology. In this phase,

panda is seen as a symbol of *guanxi* — “namely, deep trade relationships characterized by trust, reciprocity, loyalty, and longevity” (Buckingham et al., 2013, p.262).

Buckingham et al. (2013, p.262) have also identified the correlation of *guanxi* loan deals with nations supplying resources and technologies to China. The researchers identified the tendency (which was present especially clearly after the earthquake in 2008, which led to the damage of the panda preservation centre) that all the most important trading partners of China have received or are expecting to get the “gift” of a panda. France is no exception. Moreover, according to the research by Buckingham et al. (2013, pp.265-266), the loan of pandas to France has followed the signing of US\$20 billion packages of deals concerning the supply of uranium oxide and construction of a uranium treatment plant in China by French company Areva. The package also included the investments of the French energy company Total into a Chinese petrochemical plant. Moreover, the loan was delayed until the resolution of the financial crisis in Europe at the G20 summit. Buckingham et al. (2013, p.262) predict that panda diplomacy will have a long-term development and become a “dynamic interplay among politics, markets, and conservation science”.

Hartig (2013) has also attempted to distinguish steps in panda diplomacy. Dates and reasoning are similar to Buckingham et al. (2013), however, differences exist and the author identified no correlations with economic or political occasions. The following stages were highlighted by Hartig (2013 pp.60-64):

1. Panda as a political gift (the 1940s - mid-1980s);
2. Panda as a loan and a business, which brings money (the mid-1980s - mid-1990s);
3. Panda loaned for the benefits of the conservation and requires high investments from the countries-recipients (mid-1990 - currently).

As previously stated, the current phase of panda diplomacy has either started after the natural accident in 2008 which caused significant damage to the panda-conservation centre or by the general willingness of the Chinese government to emphasize the protection of pandas. In both cases, it resulted in the decision of continuing lending pandas. However, exclusively together with sharing and securing conservation and breeding techniques which will help to preserve the population of these rare animals. Buckingham et al. (2013) state repetitively the actual importance of panda protection and joint work of scientists from Europe and China to achieve the conservation and enhancement of this animal species in the world. From this perspective,

the panda conservation is seen as a “complex, dynamic interplay between politics, markets, and conservation strategy” (Buckingham et al., 2013, p.268). However, there are also other perspectives on the situation. For example, Hartig (2013) sees the conservation part of panda diplomacy mostly as a justification to overcome criticism from the part of nature protection organizations. Moreover, Lin (2009, p.3) has argued that the practice of loaning pandas to increase conservation and breeding outcomes is harmful to the species and that “A nation that truly cherishes its national treasures will not use them as diplomatic tools”. However, the last article does not justify or explain in detail the position of the author. Therefore, it is curious to look at what position the French newspapers and citizens have on the role of the breeding of pandas in a French zoo as a part of the loan deal.

After looking at the Chinese side of soft power and panda diplomacy as a tool, it is essential to get an insight into French-Chinese Relationship. Acknowledging how it started in the current century and how the opinion of people was changing through the years will provide a good background for this study.

France-China Relationship

January 27th, 1964 stated the beginning of the modern relationships between the two countries when France officially recognized the People’s Republic of China (*Ministère de l’Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères*, 2019). In 2004, the level of The French-Chinese relationship was raised to “global strategic partnership” (*Ministère de l’Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères*, 2019). The strategic dialogue between countries, launched in 2001, covers all areas of cooperation and aims to strengthen dialogue on global issues (for example, global economic governance reform, climate change, and regional crises). Besides, in 2013, the High-level Economic and Financial Dialogue began, covering all economic issues. 2014 marked the beginning of a high-level dialogue on human exchanges. Which includes “academic, scientific and cultural exchanges, as well as the promotion of women's rights and gender equality” (*Ministère de l’Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères*, 2019). Opened dialogues were followed by official visits of presidents of both countries to France and China respectively.

There are also significant concerns between China and France that play a large role in shaping the image of the first country in the eyes of the French. For example, at a high level, France regularly expresses dissatisfaction and concern over the unclear human rights

situation in China (Ministère de l'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, 2019). That made France be “actively involved in EU-China dialogue on human rights” (Ministère de l'Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, 2019).

Structure of the Thesis

This Master Degree Thesis has the following structure:

1. **Introduction.** This part introduces the reader with the background information about the theme. Moreover, it presents the research objectives and questions the author will be answering in the research. Further information on the development of the concept of soft power in the world and in China will follow, proceeding with an insight into one of its tools - the panda diplomacy. The overview of the state of current France-China relations will further open the theme and be the last part of the introduction chapter.
2. **Literature review.** This chapter will contain the review of the main literature on soft power, as well as Chinese soft power, panda diplomacy, China-Europe and France-China relations. In addition, conceptual debates on panda diplomacy will be introduced. Later on, the results of the research conducted by the author will be used to test which theory is more valid.
3. **Methodology and Data.** Introduction of the data and its collection method in this chapter will be followed by the research method and ethics.
4. **Research results.** In this chapter, the reader can find the results of the conducted research firstly on articles and secondly on readers' comments supported by the examples. Moreover, this part discusses the strengths and limitations of the research. Primary conclusions based on the research can be found throughout this chapter.
5. **Conclusions.** This part will summarize and briefly generalize the main findings of the thesis.
6. **Suggestions for further research.** In the last part of the thesis the reader will be able to get acquainted with the opportunities for further research.
7. **Bibliography**

Literature review

Soft Power

The vast majority of researchers of soft power policy state mention that Joseph Nye was the scholar who first introduced the concept of soft power to academic discussion in the 1980s. There are numerous works by J. Nye on this topic, as mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis, and the evolution of the definition of the ‘soft power’ can be traced from his publications too. Some of the publications used in this master thesis are Nye's article “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power” (2008) and book “Soft power : the means to success in world politics” (2004). It is essential to get acquainted with Nye’s perspectives on soft power as his work leads to a significant development of relevant political ideas and concepts.

Hayden’s book (2012) “The rhetoric of soft power: public diplomacy in global contexts” is a good example of a scientific work where the author critically analyses Nye’s concept of soft power. Moreover, the author compares public diplomacy and strategic communication of four countries - Japan, Venezuela, China, and the United States. The aim of the study is to reflect the special importance of culture, foreign public and communication technologies in promoting the country in the foreign policy arena.

“Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations” (2019) by Ohnesorge also considers the concept of soft power and its components. The author breaks down the concept of soft power into four components: resources, tools, technique, and results. Comparative historical analysis is also used to conduct an empirical analysis of the soft power of various actors in the international arena. The book provides fresh and innovative insight into soft power.

Getting acquainted with the literature on soft power is essential for understanding the meaning of the concept and its basic tools used in the international arena. Itself, the definition and understanding of soft power is very fluctuating and implies various components depending on the personal perspective of the scientist. In the following sub-section, we will specifically review the literature that explores soft power and China.

Soft power in China

Chinese soft power is widely discussed in academic literature by scientists from various continents. Most of them touch on similar aspects of the origin of the Chinese soft power, its tools and aims, pros and cons. For example, in Lai and Lu's edited book "China's Soft Power and International Relations" (2012), there are wide range of topics, including the structure of the Chinese soft power with its foundation, viewpoint of the country's officials on the term and its use, historical evolution of the soft power in China and possible development perspectives. However, beforehand, one of the pioneering works on Chinese soft power was published by Li (2009) under the title "Soft power: China's emerging strategy in international politics". There the author examines China's politics from the historical, cultural, political, economic, and philosophical sides. The book examines the popularization of the concept of soft power in China and demonstrates that the government of this country aims to actively promote it as one of the strategies for the rise and the improvement of international politics. In addition, the authors highlight the forces limiting the development of China's "soft power", such as the country's political values and the transition processes of politics and economics. Furthermore, Bates and Yanzhing in their article under the title "Sources and Limits of Chinese 'Soft Power'" (2006) have critically analysed applications of the tool of soft power and pointed out the main flaws which are limiting its development, namely uneven distribution in in resources to exercise soft power, legitimacy of soft power diplomacy and lack of an agreed agenda.

Varral (2012) notes how much attention China is paying to the promotion of its culture across the globe. Hubbert (2019) in the book "China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization" largely continues the line of the cultural expansion of China in the world. An example of the large network of Confucius institutes as a tool of soft power demonstrates significant discrepancies between China's soft power intentions and its practical implications. Furthermore, the author throughout the book continues to introduce other cases such as the Olympic games and Chinese expansion in cinema production. This is valuable for understanding what the role and aim of panda diplomacy among the soft power tools is.

As the aim of this Master's thesis is to analyse the Chinese soft power in France, it is essential to have a glance at the literature on diplomacy between these two countries.

The position of Chinese soft power in the world

Before concentrating exclusively on China and its position in the soft power arena, it is important to have a look at the general situation in the world. Sources for doing so are provided by Portland Media Company (United States of America) and the cooperative project of the Institute for Government and the media company Monocle (Great Britain).

At first, there was Monocle, which in 2010 made its first attempt to measure soft power among 26 countries, basing its measurements on 5 main indices: culture, diplomacy, education, business/innovation, and government (McClory, 2010, p.3). Soft power was measured with the use of statistical metrics and subjective panel scores. Afterwards, in 2015, the first yearly report called “The Soft Power 30” was launched by Portland. As the basis it used the data on the quality of the country's political institutions, their cultural attractiveness, the influence of diplomacy, the role of higher education in the world, the attractiveness of the economic model, and the country's actions in the digital arena (The Soft Power 30, 2015). In “The Soft Power 30” scientists use a combination of objective and subjective data. That is to say, they include both statistical information and results from interviews conducted using questionnaires.

According to the most recent study by Monocle (Soft Power Survey 2018/19), China is taking 19th place in the ranking of twenty countries according to their efficiency of soft power. It might be considered as a surprisingly low ranking for the country, which actively tries to promote its soft power. Scientists from Monocle explain this position of China by the presence of suspicious actions connected to the country's infrastructure expansion and the closeness to military power.

When it comes to Portland's soft power ranking of thirty countries, then it is possible to see from the table 1, presented below, that China was put even lower than in the 19th place, with its 27th place in 2018 and 2019 (The Soft Power 30, 2015). Unfortunately, the research mostly explains the positioning of the first two countries, rather than the twenty last ones. However, it can be seen that out of six assessed categories (enterprise, engagement, culture, government, education, and digital development), China is evaluated highly only in the categories of culture and engagement, being in the 7th and 10th places respectively. Moreover, in a special part of Portland's research designated to China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI),

scientists claim that the BRI initiative has arguable results on countries that agreed to build BRI projects. The project lead hosts in debt and countries cooperating with China started to worry about corruption, and asked themselves, how beneficial the project is for them. Since the dominant workforce is Chinese and governing is primarily conducted by the Chinese state-owned enterprises, there is no significant economic development of countries that agreed to build BRI projects. The previous attractiveness of the BRI is getting erased from the people's memories and the initiative faces its shortcomings.

Table 1. - Portland's The Soft Power 30 ranking

		2016	2017	2018	2019
Top 10 countries (2016-2019)	United States	1	3	4	5
	United Kingdom	2	2	1	2
	Germany	3	4	3	3
	Canada	4	5	6	7
	France	5	1	2	1
	Australia	6	8	10	9
	Japan	7	6	5	8
	Switzerland	8	7	7	6
	Sweden	8	7	7	6
	Netherlands	10	10	9	10
	China	28	25	27	27

Source: <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf>

However, it is arguable, how deeply one can rely on these two ways of measuring soft power, since one of the major challenges for such research is its subjective nature, and the basic limitations of using indexes (The Soft Power 30, 2019). In attempts to numerically measure relative indicators, there are significant limitations that do not allow to fully represent the topic covered. Besides, comparing the results of studies based on indices calculated by different methods also entails a large number of potential flaws due to the differences in

research approaches. Therefore, both examples of soft power ranking demonstrated should be looked at critically. However, it is important to understand what were the initial aims of China when implementing soft power techniques. Therefore, the next extract will provide further background information on the process of development of the concept of soft power in the country.

France-China Relations

When looking for relevant information about the France-China diplomatic relations, books dedicated to the process of China's globalization in the world were covered. For example, Wang's and Miao's "Handbook on China and Globalization" (2019) represents a recent study on political trends in the process. France is stated occasionally as a part of the Belt & Road initiative and by being an economic and strategic partner of China.

D'Hooghe's article called "The Limits of China's Soft power in Europe: Beijing's Public Diplomacy Puzzle" is more French-oriented. It not only provides some basic understanding of Chinese soft power diplomacy in Europe, but also includes qualitative research using questionnaires conducted with the aim of understanding the opinions of French, German, and UK citizens. At the end of the scientific paper, D'Hooghe reflects on the obtained results making an attempt of connecting fluctuations of people's opinions with certain political events. A survey conducted in France by Kantar Public in 2018 has researched the opinions of the French of the growing power of China in France in many ways following D'Hooghe's paper. In this project, the used questionnaires also occasionally compared China with the United States of America and Russia making it possible to clearly see the position of the first country in the mind of the French citizens, how strong or important are the Sino-French relations and what is its reputation comparing to the US and Russia. Moreover, it is interesting to look at the study conducted by the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) in collaboration with other institutes around the world in 2020. It aimed at identifying and analysing changes of opinions of the French public about China over the past year caused by the coronavirus. This study can be looked at as a continuation of questionnaire-research projects.

Now, after talking about the literature on soft power, Chinese soft power and French-Chinese diplomacy, it is time to address academic literature that is dedicated to panda diplomacy.

Opinions of the French people on Chinese politics in the sphere of soft power through the ages

In the research by d'Hooghe (2010) called "The Limits of China's Soft Power in Europe. Beijing's Public Diplomacy Puzzle " attempted to measure the perceptions of people in the United Kingdom, France and Germany based on polls. She was able to trace certain dependence on events and positive/negative changes in public opinions. For four years from 2005 to 2008, there was a significant drop in the popularity of China in France, and the percentage of favourability has dropped by 32 points from 60 to 28% (d'Hooghe, 2010, p.16) this slide continued in 2009. Furthermore, a direct separation between the image of China as a country and average Chinese people can be seen when comparing answers to the questions about the perception of the French on Chinese people and the Chinese government. The first type of question will receive a significantly higher number of favourable answers (d'Hooghe, 2010, p.19). However, large percentages of people in Germany and France think highly negatively about the Chinese as well. D'Hooghe (2010, p.19) provided the following possible explanation for the change of mind of the French people: "a likely reason for France's high figure is the strong anti-France reaction of the Chinese population and subsequent boycott of French products and supermarkets in China immediately after the anti-China incident during the Olympic Torch relay in Paris". There is a strong dependence of opinions of the European people and the French on China when the last country is believed to be committing human rights violations (e.g., happenings in Tibet).

The researcher also claims that large numbers of "people in Europe worry about China's economic influence on their country and are anxious about the consequences of China's economic growth for their country's employment and industry" (d'Hooghe, 2010, p.19), and again, the biggest percentage of people with this viewpoint according to research is present in France, with Germany being in the middle and the United Kingdom in the end.

Moreover, the research conducted in 2018, 8 years later in France by Kantar Public for the Institut Montaigne, "suggested that French people are increasingly aware of this rise (the rise of China), and not necessarily in a negative way" (Corre et al., 2019). The opinion of the French concerning China seems to be more positive that year with 31% per cent of the respondents compared to 35% in the United States and 44% in Russia considering the country in question as a threat (Corre et al., 2019).

Furthermore, China in 2018 was considered in France by 81% of respondents as “an influential country in the world”, by 47% as “an influencer in France” and by 13% as “very influential” in the French territory (Corre et al., 2019). There was a high increase in China-related activities. China began to be seen as a politically, economically, scientifically and technologically developed a powerful country. Only 6% of respondents described it as a country where low-cost goods for future export are manufactured (Corre et al., 2019). Moreover, tourism from China was seen as bringing a big revenue to France, and especially the Ile de France region.

However, there are high doubts if the long-term Chinese presence in France is possible. There are two main concerns about it. Firstly, the topic of Chinese investments in the country has a negative perception within 50% of the French (Corre et al., 2019). China is pursuing an aggressive investment policy in France, investing in various industries and infrastructure. Secondly, this economic expansion also raises concerns about the low number of workplaces created by Chinese companies for locals. Most of the companies from China bring employees from their head offices in Beijing, Shanghai, etc. Thirdly, technology transfers and the general expansion of Chinese Internet technologies raises debates in France due to possible privacy issues.

Also, it is interesting to look at the study conducted by the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI) in collaboration with other institutes around the world in 2020 aimed at analyzing and identifying French public opinion about China and its changes over the past year caused by the coronavirus. The research made an effort to analyse the feelings of people towards China and the change of it during the last three years. According to the findings, only 15% of respondents have positive feelings about China in France, which is the second lowest among the countries looked at in the research (Sweden, Germany, UK, Czechia, Hungary, Spain, Slovakia, Italy, Poland, Latvia, Serbia, Russia) (European Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19, 2020). When it comes to the change of the feeling towards China France is taking third place among the listed countries with attitude changing very negatively during the given period, with over 50% of respondents claiming their opinion has worsened. Three priorities of the French people concerning foreign policy in China are: “cybersecurity”, “cooperation on global issues” and “advancing human rights and democracy” (European Public Opinion on China in the Age of COVID-19, 2020). The results of this project can be to a certain extent extrapolated on the public opinion about China before the beginning of the

coronavirus since the research partly touches on the changes in the opinion for three years. Moreover, according to the findings, respondents in Sweden, the UK, and Germany or France have not seen the COVID-19 as a “spread due to Chinese people eating bats and wild animals”, a notion featured by most mainstream media but criticized as unfounded and reinforcing cultural stereotypes. This survey result demonstrates that the coronavirus situation has not dramatically influenced the opinion of China.

Generally speaking, it can be seen that the opinions of French people about China are highly fluctuational and extremely dependent on the current events, the behaviour of the Chinese government in the sphere of human rights, technology, cybersecurity and profits of France as the country.

To further demonstrate the significance of the relationship between France and China at the present stage, we can cite this example of the initiative of Emanuel Macron who initiated the creation of the European Institute for Chinese Studies (EURICS) institute which “aims at deepening the understanding of China’s new directions in all fields” (EURICS - Institute, 2020). In the introduction part of this institute, its independence is especially highlighted as the guarantee of “its research, analysis and debate” (EURICS - Institute, 2020). The research spheres of the institute include “environmental transition, population ageing, urbanisation, migrations, social inequalities, learning society, cultural change, economic transformations, automation, as well as on China’s international role and China’s place in its regional environment” (EURICS - Institute, 2020). It can be seen that France is taking an active role in understanding China, as China is becoming an important partner.

From all mentioned above it can be seen that the relations between the two countries are a popular research theme due to its importance on the international arena. Economic relations between two countries have a long history and on the current stage are only growing. Chinese companies are making numerous acquisitions of properties and other types of long-term investments in France. The development of diplomacy and economics between France and China has inevitably led to the increased interest in research on China in France.

Panda diplomacy

Buckingham et al. (2013) in the article “Diplomats and Refugees: Panda Diplomacy, Soft “Cuddly” Power, and the New Trajectory in Panda Conservation” have looked at the panda loaning and conservation from the prism of Chinese economic relations. They identified patterns between panda-recipient countries and significant positive economic cooperation with China. Buckingham et al. claim that there are tight connections between panda conservation, politics, and market changes. Moreover, researchers (Buckingham et al. (2013), Hartig (2013), and Lin (2009) have identified three stages of panda diplomacy which were stated in the introduction chapter of this thesis. They can be summarized as pandas being a political gift from the middle of the XX century till almost the end of it, pandas becoming a loan and a business, which brings money in the end of the XX century, and pandas loaned for the benefits of the conservation, which requires high investments from the countries-recipients in the modern century.

Similar ideas were expressed by Hartig (2013) in the article called “Panda Diplomacy: The cutest part of China’s public diplomacy”. There the author highlighted the symbolic part of panda diplomacy and pointed out that good economic and political relations between countries facilitate the negotiation process of loaning pandas. Development stages of panda diplomacy were also proposed which relatively correlate with those by Buckingham et al. (2013). However, in this article, the author did not point out specific economic events between the countries leading to the receipt of a panda. Less emphasis is put on panda conservation techniques or benefits, the author sees the panda loaning practice mostly as a political undertaking.

It is equally important to note Lin's 2009 article, “China’s panda diplomacy” which, as the works by Hartig and Buckingham et al. mentioned above, distinguished three stages of panda diplomacy, linking it to economics and politics. However, there is a significant difference, since Lin is stating, in conclusion, her strong opinion on the harmfulness of transporting and loaning pandas to other countries and claims that it is not contributing to the protection of pandas while Hartig and Buckingham et al. do not deny, but rather support panda diplomacy as a way to support the panda population

The conceptual debates on the value of panda conservation in terms of panda diplomacy stated above will be questioned in the thesis. An analysis of the studied media articles will reveal the prevailing tendencies in the French media that support panda diplomacy or not as a strategy for the conservation of this animal species. Besides, the theory about the role of the economic component and business contracts mentioned in the works of Lin (2009), Hartig (2013) and Buckingham et al. (2013) will also be considered.

Methodology

The research question will be answered by conducting an analysis of 15 newspaper articles retrieved from three French newspapers all with different political orientations and their readers' comments on the articles. These are Le Figaro from the right wing, France 24 from the centre and Le Monde from the left wing of French politics.

Le Figaro

The first newspaper is Le Figaro, which was primarily established in 1829. In 1866, it became a daily morning newspaper and covers various topics but concentrates on current political events (Laroche-Signorile, 2019). Its main competitor in terms of circulation and popularity is Le Monde. However, the editorial independence of le Figaro is in question. The main reason for this is its conservative editorial line and status as an important French conservative paper, which is especially appealing to French upper and middle class. Since 2004, it has been owned by the Dassault group, which caused controversy in the past because of Dassault's political ties with the conservative party in France (The Carlyle Group: Le Figaro, 2002).

Le Monde

The second newspaper chosen for this project is Le Monde. It is a French daily evening newspaper founded in 1944 by order of Charles de Gaulle (Le Monde - New World Encyclopedia, 2018). The main focus of this outlet is on the analytical representation of the news rather than on the presentation of events. Le Monde is considered to be centre-left, although the newspaper, which declares its independence, rejects that. The opinion of Le Monde is shared with broad layers of the elite and in the corridors of power. It has the largest distribution among the French daily newspapers abroad. Their headquarters is located in

Paris. It has been published continuously since its first edition and it is one of the most important and widely known newspapers in the world. Le Monde is published by Groupe Le Monde and, since 1995, this news outlet has been available online.

France 24

France 24 is a French public international television channel (About, 2012). It is a part of the public television and radio company, France Médias Monde. The channel was created on the initiative of the former French President, Jacques Chirac. France 24 is focused on international broadcasting. Since 2008, the French government through France Médias Monde, which has bought a majority stake from Groupe TF1 and France Télévisions, has controlled the broadcaster.

Readers of the news websites

When it comes to who is using the media outlets mentioned above, in the case of Le Monde and Le Figaro the audience is French-speaking. As for France 24, it covers a variety of languages and is initially designated to diverse audiences in different parts of the world. Le Monde has a significantly bigger number of users (see table below) compared to Le Figaro due to its wider presence in French-speaking countries.

Table 1. The number of users and languages of the news websites.

News website	Number of visitors per month	Languages of the news website
Le Monde	over 40 000 000 (VoxEurop, 2020)	French (Le Monde - Toute l'actualité En Continu, 2020)
Le Figaro	7 000 000 (Wibbitz, 2020)	French (Le Figaro, 2020)
France 24	16 500 000 (France 24, 2020)	French, Arabic, English and Spanish (Who Are We?, 2020)

More about the data and data collection

Articles

All selected articles correspond to one topic: pandas rented by France from China for ZooPark de Beauval in 2012. Such an approach will allow the capture of a representative sample for the research and exploration of the phenomenon of Panda diplomacy in France in-depth. For the analysis, five articles will be retrieved from each of the newspapers. I have chosen this number of articles after making prior investigations and discovering that not all three of the Media outlets have an equally large number of publications concerning the theme in question. Themes were distinguished after going through the databases of Le Monde and Le Figaro using the following keywords: “*pandas*”, “*panda*”, “*ZooParc de Beauval*”, “*diplomatie panda* (panda diplomacy)” and “*Soft power chinoise* (Chinese soft power)”. After reviewing the lists of articles in the newspapers containing the keywords indicated above and comparing the most frequently recurring themes in the two media outlets, the most popular topics were distinguished for further research. Unfortunately, France 24 does not possess a unique database; therefore, the Google search engine was used to select the articles using the same list of keywords buy adding the keyword “France 24”. The articles will be divided into three main groups, according to the results:

- Before the arrival of pandas.
- Upon pandas’ arrival.
- After the arrival of pandas.

Table 2. Articles devided into groups

Category	News outlet	Original name of the article	Translated name of the article (if relevant)
Before the arrival of pandas	Le Figaro	<i>Deux pandas de Chine en route pour la France</i>	Two pandas from China on their way to France
	Le Monde	<i>Le panda, ambassadeur du « soft power » chinois</i>	The panda, ambassador of Chinese "soft power"
Upon pandas’ arrival	Le Figaro	<i>Les deux pandas prêtés sont en France</i>	The two pandas loaned are in France
	Le Figaro	<i>Huan Huan et Yuan Zi, les deux pandas diplomates</i>	Huan Huan and Yuan Zi, the two pandas diplomats

	Le Monde	<i>"Pandamania" diplomatique au parc zoologique de Beauval</i>	Diplomatic "Pandamania" at Beauval Zoological Park
	Le Monde	<i>Huan Huan, le win-win et nous</i>	Huan Huan, the win-win and us
	Le Monde	<i>Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grande pompe en France</i>	Two Chinese giant pandas welcomed with great pomp in France
	France 24	<i>Accueil en grande pompe pour les deux pandas géants prêtés par la Chine</i>	Welcome with great fanfare for the two giant pandas loaned from China
	France 24	<i>Giant pandas 'Happy' and 'Chubby' arrive in Paris</i>	
After the arrival of pandas	Le Figaro	<i>Panda [pan-da] n. m. Ours en plus</i>	Panda [pan-da] n. mr. Additional bear
	Le Figaro	<i>Le bébé panda du zoo de Beauval joue les stars</i>	Beauval Zoo's baby panda plays the stars
	Le Monde	<i>Pandas : une naissance rare au zoo de Beauval</i>	Pandas: a rare birth at Beauval Zoo
	France 24	<i>Première sortie publique de Yuan Meng, le célèbre bébé panda du zoo de Beauval</i>	First public outing of Yuan Meng, the famous baby panda from Beauval Zoo
	France 24	<i>A Beauval, Brigitte Macron baptise le bébé panda, un geste diplomatique</i>	In Beauval, Brigitte Macron baptizes the baby panda, a diplomatic gesture
	France 24	<i>French-born panda cub makes first public appearance</i>	
	France 24	<i>France's first baby panda celebrates first birthday</i>	

The separation of the themes allows me to trace changes in the representation of Chinese soft power in France, and the panda diplomacy in particular. Moreover, it will be easier to trace the changes of opinion in the users' comments.

Since Le Monde and Le Figaro provide their users with a facility to leave comments to articles, I have made a decision to include them into the research alongside the articles themselves. In order to leave a comment, a user is required to register on the website and create a semi-anonymous username, which is put alongside their comment.

Unfortunately, France 24 does not have a possibility to put a comment; therefore, it was excluded from this part of the research. However, I strongly consider that the usage of two media sources will not bring major restrictions and will lead to in-depth results since both of the newspapers play major roles in the country. This can provide a good example and give an insight into the opinions of people.

The same division into three groups (before the arrival of pandas, upon pandas' arrival, after the arrival of pandas) will be used for analysing users' comments. It will allow the following of the same research scheme as with the articles, and possible differences in tones of articles and users' comments will be traceable.

Table 3. Articles from which user's comments were selected for the analysis

Magazine	Original name of the article in French	Translated name of the article	Number of users' comments
Le Figaro	<i>Les deux pandas prêtés sont en France</i>	The two pandas loaned are in France	29
	<i>Huan Huan et Yuan Zi, les deux pandas diplomates</i>	Huan Huan and Yuan Zi, the two pandas diplomats	50
	<i>Deux pandas de Chine en route pour la France</i>	Two pandas from China on their way to France	155
	<i>Panda [pan-da] n. m. Ours en plus</i>	Panda [pan-da] n. mr. Additional bear	5

	<i>Le bébé panda du zoo de Beauval joue les stars</i>	Beauval Zoo's baby panda plays the stars	1
Le Monde	<i>"Pandamania" diplomatique au parc zoologique de Beauval</i>	Diplomatic "Pandamania" at Beauval Zoological Park	3
	<i>Le panda, ambassadeur du « soft power » chinois</i>	The panda, ambassador of Chinese "soft power"	12
	<i>Huan Huan, le win-win et nous</i>	Huan Huan, the win-win and us	2
	<i>Pandas : une naissance rare au zoo de Beauval</i>	Pandas: a rare birth at Beauval Zoo	9
	<i>Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grande pompe en France</i>	Two Chinese giant pandas welcomed with great pomp in France	20
Total number of users' comments			286

Methods

A qualitative analysis of both reader comments and newspaper articles will be conducted since it will allow an in-depth and profound analysis. As for the method, I am going to use content analysis as the main tool to identify “both conscious and unconscious messages communicated by text” (Given, 2008, p.120).

Content analysis will be highly beneficial since according to Given (2008, p.120), it “may reveal recurrent instances of “items” or themes, or they may reveal broader discourses”, which is the aim of conducting this research. Such a scientific method allows flexibility, systematization of data and demonstration of the changes in people’s views over time. The main topics in news articles and comments will be identified and compared to see the possible variations. Within already distinguished relevant to the topic in question themes discourse structures will be examined. After conducting the analysis an emphasis will be but

on correlations between the scientific approaches of Buckingham et al. (2013), Lin (2009), and Hartig (2013) stated in the Chapter I of the thesis.

Data analysis

As a part of the data collection process, all articles and reader comments on the theme were selected and downloaded between the 1st and 7th September 2020. When conducting the analysis a review of previous literature on the subject will help to identify the main discourses and implement the content analysis on both sources of data. An immersive repetitive read through all the articles and comments was performed to identify the main themes. The reading was chosen over the relevant computer analytical programs as it enables a more in-deep insight into the content of the articles and comments.

Research ethics

As for research ethics, it is unlikely that problems will be faced when using newspaper articles. However, when including users' comments into the data, the issue of ethics may arise. However, since users' comments were freely written and posted on the websites with open access, I consider that there are no obstacles for gathering the data can without getting special permission (Thomas-Meyer et al., 2017, p.4). Moreover, in both, Le Monde and Le Figaro readers can freely use nicknames, which are protecting their anonymity. After retrieving the information, measures to anonymize all the comments were taken. In my thesis, I first provide an overall analysis of the comments and then provide 2 users' quotes with further explanations. This allowed me to properly anonymize the data without undermining the final results and demonstrate on what were based my conclusions.

Results of the analysis

In this part of the thesis I will cover the results of the research. Firstly, the findings from articles retrieved from Le Monde, Le Figaro and France 24 will be presented and then the readers' comments to the publications will be analysed. Such a structure of the chapter will allow the trace the changes in the discourses of news articles and readers' comments.

Analysis of articles

After analysing 15 articles connected to the panda diplomacy and, more specifically, to France lending two pandas for the ZooPark de Beauval from Chengdu conservation centre for pandas (see chapter “Methodology” for the list) from three different politically oriented newspapers main themes and discourses were identified.

When looking at the differences between France 24, Le Monde and Le Figaro certain characteristics of these news sources were distinguished. France 24 has the fewest number of articles concerning pandas in ZooPark de Beauval, however it is hard to say the exact number of them as this news outlet does not provide build-in search possibilities, and only browser search is available. Among the found and analysed articles, all to some extent touched on the conservation and assistance in the reproduction of pandas as species and the importance of supporting the continued existence of pandas. The second most popular topic covered is Franco-Chinese politics, and the third is the vision of France as a privileged country to receive pandas. This extract from the article “Giant pandas 'Happy' and 'Chubby' arrive in Paris” (2012) can be a good example of the main discourses presented in this news outlet:

“A deal on the endangered animals, famous for their reluctance to breed, was to have been announced at the G20 summit in the French resort of Cannes last November, but had to be delayed due to the eurozone crisis.

China is famed for its "panda diplomacy", using the bears as diplomatic gifts to other countries. Just 1,600 remain in the wild in China, with some 300 others in captivity worldwide - mostly in China.

David Algranti, who was named a "pambassador" in 2010 and spent several weeks as the bears' official guardian in Chengdu, was one of a handful of people given privileged access to the quarantined pandas." (NEWS WIRES, 2012)

Primarily, the main trends in the articles published by France 24 are a reflection of the importance of preserving pandas and France-China economic relations. Moreover, they tend to sometimes discuss the economic component of panda diplomacy. The articles retrieved from France 24 and the discourses used in them create a politically positive vision of Sino-France relations, which is expected from a government-owned news outlet.

Le Monde, in turn, mainly discusses Sino-French diplomacy in articles on the topic of pandas in the ZooPark de Beauval. In addition, as in France 24, the issues of conservation of pandas are raised and the practice of renting pandas is treated positively.

The following extract from one of the articles can be given:

“Avant leur départ samedi, les pandas avaient fait l'objet d'une fête d'adieu solennelle, dans la base de reproduction des pandas de Chengdu où vivent l'immense majorité des représentants en captivité de cette espèce très menacée. Yuan Zi et Huan Huan sont les premiers pandas accueillis en France depuis 1973, quand la Chine maoïste avait offert un couple à la France de Georges Pompidou.

Les intervenants se sont refusés à donner le prix du transfert. Une source proche du dossier évoquait une somme de 750 000 euros”

[Before their departure on Saturday, the pandas had been the subject of a solemn farewell party at the panda breeding base in Chengdu where the vast majority of the captive representatives of this highly endangered species live. Yuan Zi and Huan Huan are the first pandas welcomed in France since 1973, when Maoist China offered a couple to France from Georges Pompidou.

The speakers refused to give the price of the transfer. A source close to the case evoked a sum of 750,000 euros.] (Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grande pompe en France, 2012)

It can be seen how the seven lines from the article touch upon the panda conservation and its importance, France being a privileged country to receive pandas for rent and the price of the transportation. One of the discourses that plays an important role in the articles of this publisher is the mentioning of the costs caused by the transportation and keeping of pandas, however, without stating a negative or positive attitude towards it to let the reader come up with the conclusions. However, many articles of this publisher also mention the positive upcoming economic effects of pandas in ZooPark de Beauval.

Le Figaro, like Le Monde, in many ways examines the economic and political cooperation of the two countries in the articles. Moreover, the costs of transportation of pandas are again very often stated in all the analysed articles. However, the main difference is the criticism of Franco-Chinese diplomacy, the statement of the failure of panda diplomacy and a negative attitude towards this method of conservation of pandas, which can sometimes be found in Le Figaro's articles.

A good example in the following extract from one of the articles:

“Comme l'explique France 3, ce prêt pourrait être une indication des bonnes relations qu'entretiennent la France avec la Chine. La diplomatie du panda, initiée par Mao qui offrait parfois un panda à ses hôtes de marque, serait-elle toujours d'actualité? Pas si sûr, puisque nos deux plantigrades ne sont ni donnés, ni prêtés à la France. Pékin les louerait, pour la coquette somme d'un million de dollars par an, soit 750.000 euros.” [As France 3 explains, this loan could be an indication of the good relations that France has with China. The panda diplomacy, initiated by Mao who sometimes offered a panda to his distinguished guests, would it still be topical? Not so sure, since our two plantigrades are neither given nor loaned to France. Beijing would rent them, for the tidy sum of one million dollars per year, or 750,000 euros.] (Petitpont, 2012).

It can be seen how the author in three sentences questions the quality of France-China relations, the appropriateness of Chinese soft power techniques, and highlights the high costs of keeping the pandas. This is the only news source whose journalists quite openly state their attitude of doubt towards Sino-French politics. Very few emphases comparing to France 24 and Le Monde are put on the panda breeding and conservation. The negative attitude of published articles towards significant expenses on pandas in ZooPark de Beauval can be explained by the political stance of the news outlet, and its belonging to the right wing politics.

It is also extremely important to pay attention to the comments left on the articles. They are a good source for understanding the opinion of the French about China. Unfortunately, as stated previously, France 24 cannot be included in the analysis as this news outlet does not provide a possibility for its readers to leave comments. However, Le Figaro and Le Monde and offering this opportunity for expressing opinions. Comments of readers provide a

valuable source of information which lets to look deeper into the public opinion of the French people about panda diplomacy.

Analysis of comments

Comments on articles from Le Monde and Le Figaro were analyzed. The examples presented above directly quote the users and neither grammar nor punctuation was changed, translations are provided. Significantly more reader activities were presented on Le Figaro's website, where readers expressed their opinions 240 times, comparing to only 46 times on the page of Le Monde. Such a significant difference was unexpected as, according to the average number of visitors per month, Le Figaro has almost six times fewer visitors than Le Monde. This can be probably explained by the editorial line and writing style of the journalists in Le Figaro, which add significantly more sharp points for discussion and are expressing their negative attitude towards the various aspects of panda diplomacy. For example, the article in Le Figaro which provoked the biggest number of comments (150), was called “Two pandas from China on their way to France” and included the criticism of costs brought by pandas and questions the efficiency of panda diplomacy.

The main discourses considered in both Le Monde and Le Figaro are the exploitation of pandas as a political tool, the harm caused by this method of the conservation of pandas (this discourse is often directly related to the first one), the insolvency of expenses associated with the lease, maintenance of pandas, and their transportation.

It is valuable to have a look at examples of comments:

1. Comments on overspending caused by pandas

“Que d'argent foutu en l'air !” [So much money screwed up!](Le Monde, Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grand pompe en France)

“Qu'est ce qu'ils ont ces pandas pour qu'il coûte si chère, est ce que c'était utile de dépenser autant de somme dans une période de crise.” [What do these pandas have that cost so much, was it useful to spend so much money in a time of crisis.] (Le Figaro, Les deux pandas prêtés sont en France)

In Le Monde and Le Figaro, this is the most popular type of comments, which always has a negative connotation, criticizing the attitude of those in power towards the money of the nation. People are posing questions if such expenses are well justified and are actually necessary. They are most prevalent in Le Figaro and are following the editorial critique. Moreover, certain statements connected to overspending are sometimes interlinked with other matters that will be presented below.

1.2. Comments on overspending connected to the vision of this conservation method as harmful / the doubtful Chinese politics

“Et combien coûte ce bambin ? Les Chinois louent l'animal et il faut en plus payer les soigneurs chinois ... car le commerce avec la Chine est toujours à sens unique.” [And how much does this toddler cost? The Chinese rent the animal and you also have to pay the Chinese healers ... because trade with China is always one-sided.] (Le Figaro, Le bébé panda du zoo de Beauval a 1 an (et il pèse déjà 30 kg !))

“A l'heure d'internet et de l'information, il est criminel de sortir ces animaux de leur environnement naturel pour les exhiber. Une émission, réalisée par des spécialistes, nous en apprendrait bien plus que la vue de ce mammifère dans sa cage. Nous avons 4 millions d'exclus et 1 millions d'euros de location par an sur le dos. Il serait plus logique de et plus honnête de faire payer cette location à ceux qui l'ont commanditée, puis de leur faire prendre la place des pauvres bêtes pour 10 ans.” [In the internet and information age, it is criminal to take these animals out of their natural environment to exhibit them. A program, produced by specialists, would teach us much more than the sight of this mammal in its cage. We have 4 million already spent and 1 million euros of rental per year awaiting. It would be more logical and more honest to charge this rental to those who sponsored it, then to make them take the place of the poor animals for 10 years.] (Le Monde, Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grand pompe en France)

However, most of the comments concentrate exclusively on the expenses, which are considered to be harmful to the economy, and unnecessary, certain readers, still, propose other solutions for panda conservation that will be less costly but more beneficial from their perspective. Moreover, as can be seen in the first comment, extreme expenditures can be used

to criticising the political line of the Chinese government or undermining the diplomatic achievements of one's own country. This type of comment can be met relatively often in both, Le Monde and Le Figaro.

2. Comments on the exploitation of pandas and harmfulness of the conservation techniques

“encore et toujours ces trafics lucratifs d'animaux esclaves qu'on enferme à vie dans des zoos où ils se morfondent et où l'on nous fait croire que c'est pour "préserver l'espèce" et pour "sensibiliser les plus jeunes". quel exemple en effet pour les enfants que de leur montrer des êtres vivants conscients et sensibles privés de liberté. quand à la préservation de l'espèce, on sait désormais qu'elle n'est possible qu'in situ, dans des réserves à l'abri des braconniers” [again and again these lucrative trafficking of slave animals that are locked up for life in zoos where they languish and where we are made to believe that it is to "preserve the species" and to "educate the youngest". what an example indeed for children to show them conscious and sensitive living beings deprived of their liberty. when it comes to the preservation of the species, we now know that it is only possible in situ, in reserves sheltered from poachers] (Le Monde, Deux pandas géants chinois accueillis en grand pompe en France)

“Avez-vous d'autres choix que la reproduction et la préservation "en captivité" pour cette espèce menacée pour le moment? Les mettre au zoo n'est pas une façon de les préserver? Pourquoi choisissez-vous intentionnellement que la facette négative de la chose sans donner des conseils positifs?” [Do you have any other choice than breeding and preservation "in captivity" for this endangered species at this time? Isn't putting them in the zoo a way to preserve them? Why are you intentionally choosing the negative side of things without giving positive advice?] (Le Monde, Pandas: a rare birth at Beauval Zoo)

Interestingly, this type of comments where readers express their dissatisfaction with the current conservation methods of pandas and their exploitation is prevalent in Le Monde. While in Le Figaro it does not play a significant role, as there the comments of the readers are mostly concentrated on financial losses, which is very much in line with the articles published in this news outlet. Le Monde pays slightly more attention to panda conservation techniques and animal protection.

3. Positive comments

“bienvenue, je me réjouis d'aller les voir” [welcome, I look forward to seeing them] (Le Monde, Two Chinese giant pandas welcomed with great fanfare in France)

“Je suis bien content que les pandas chinois s'installent dans notre pays. Mes enfants seront heureux de les voir et nous aussi. Il faut bien vivre même si on est dans une période de crise et surtout en crise morale chez certains d'entre nous.” [I am very happy that the Chinese pandas are settling in our country. My children will be happy to see them and so will we. We have to live well even if we are in a period of crisis and especially in a moral crisis for some of us.] (Le Figaro, Huan Huan et Yuan Zi, les deux pandas diplomates).

This was the rarest type of comments, almost not present in Le Monde, but sometimes emerging in Le Figaro, most likely due to the significantly bigger number of comments in this news outlet. Moreover, likely, the reason for such a few positive comments is that negative aspects are more likely to be discussed. The author has met only approximately 4 positive remarks out of 286 comments.

It can be seen that most of the discourses revealed after conducting the research on news articles and readers' comments to them are in line with the works of Lin (2009), Hartig (2013) and Buckingham et al. (2013). Hartig, in 2013, was writing about the panda being a very appealing creature due to its “cuteness”, and the analysis showed the presence of discourse which were describing pandas as a “cute” animal in all new websites. Moreover, in the works of all, Buckingham et al. (2013), Hartig (2013) and Lin (2009) the current stage of panda diplomacy tightly links the economic affairs between China and countries-recipients of pandas. Numerous analysed articles were also drawing connections between, for example, the G20 summit or particular signed economic deals between France and China, and how it resulted in delay or acceleration of the pandas arriving at ZooPark de Beauval. This confirms the validity of scientist's ideas. Furthermore, in the articles of all the outlets, significant attention is put on the conservation of pandas as the benefit of panda diplomacy, similarly to the ideas expressed by Hartig and Buckingham et al. in 2013. Many articles, and especially ones released by France 24, include discourses supporting the France-China cooperation aimed at the preservation of pandas.

When it comes to comments readers left on the articles, it can be seen that the benefits of this method of panda conservation are highly criticized in line with the thoughts of Lin (2009), who was claiming that this type of diplomacy is harmful for the preservation of pandas and that a truly caring nation will not use their endangered animal as a political tool. However, it is important to state that this type of argument will be significantly outweighed by the comments criticizing the extreme expenses caused by transportation and keeping of pandas.

Strengths and limitations of the research

The research was not aiming at providing generalizable findings on Chinese soft power, but, instead, was intending to cover a particular phenomenon of panda diplomacy and study it in-depth. The analysed articles were retrieved from three news outlets with different political stances (left wing, centre, right-wing). This allowed getting a broad perspective on panda diplomacy from various angles. Articles were retrieved basing on particular timeframes that allowed us to compare the material. Moreover, the data collected was gathered from freely accessible sources, which provide anonymity to their users. This, in terms of analysing the reader's comments, leads to more pure results, as people were able to express their thoughts freely.

When stating the limitations of the research, it is important to state that even though articles were retrieved from left wing, centre and right-wing news outlets, their position cannot be extrapolated on the whole French political arena. Moreover, in terms of readers' comments, the main limitation is the fact that only certain categories of people are sharing their opinions on the websites of Le Monde and Le Figaro. Therefore, it creates a rough representation of the general attitude of the French towards panda diplomacy. Another limitation connected to the comments is the absence of possibility to leave the opinions on the website of France 24, which made us exclude them from the second part of the analysis. However, since Le Monde and Le Figaro still represent the left wing and right-wing sides of the French political arena, the comparison of both of them allowed comparing and identifying the general main patterns.

Conclusions

After getting familiar with the role of the Chinese soft power in France and looking at it through the prism of a specific case of panda diplomacy, the following answer to the first research question about the role of Chinese soft power in France can be given - the soft power plays a crucial role in establishing the long-term successful presence of the investments in China and continuation of Sino-France cooperation. The panda diplomacy is going in line with the development of economic relations and corresponds to the signing of significant deals between the two countries. Such a soft power tool like panda diplomacy is aimed at the creation of a positive reputation of the wide public in France and as well as at demonstrating the Sino-France achievements. Even though in a big number of the comments people state their doubts about the actual “quality” of France-China relations, some are still taking the arrival of pandas at the ZooPark de Beauval positively as they, for example, can show such a rare animal to their children.

Answering the second research question “What is the image of “panda diplomacy” as a part of the Chinese soft power policy in France? What is the attitude of the French people towards it?” it can be seen that the image of panda diplomacy in France is controversial. Some news outlets are blaming French authorities for excessive expenses caused by pandas, while others are celebrating the great achievements and marking the privilege of France in getting a possibility to participate in the preservation of rare animal species. When it comes to the opinions of the wide public concerning panda diplomacy, the main topics are the significant expenses of money for the transportation of pandas and their accommodation in the ZooPark de Beauval. People are stating their doubts about the necessities of these costs. Moreover, the French people are doubtful about the France-China relations and of how actually profitable they are for their country. However, there is still excitement about the possibility of seeing the rare panda in real life.

When looking at how and why the panda diplomacy is carried out it should be said that this soft power tool plays its own unique role and takes place when China wants to celebrate the economic achievements with its partner country. In France, according to the articles, the rental contracts of pandas were signed following the successful deals and supported by the government, Zoo facilities and foundations, and are partly financed by sponsors. For

example, FedEx has provided transportation for pandas from China to France on a specially equipped plane with a special design and a logo of the ZooPark de Beauval (see the photo in Appendix 1).

The results obtain upon the complexion of this thesis can have practical implications. For example, companies can get a better understanding of what are the main points of interest and worry among French citizens. Moreover, countries, when seeing the results, can modify their foreign policies to be more successful. News outlets can also benefit from the results by getting a clearer understanding of their readers and which aspects they are most interested in.

Suggestions for further research

It was extremely fascinating to consider the soft power of China within France and such a diplomatic promotion tool as panda diplomacy. The analysis of articles from various news outlets, together with comments from readers, shed light on the position of newspapers and their audience, both on the soft power of China, and on the practice of renting pandas.

During the article selection process, I noted a large amount of visual material, such as news clips and photographs. In the event of further research on this topic, in my opinion, it would be extremely valuable to draw attention to it. This approach can open up other sides of animal diplomacy and how it affects the reputation of countries through the use of the news network of television channels.

In addition, it is possible to conduct studies on similar topics in other countries of the world renting pandas to identify both political patterns and paterns of changes in the opinions of the population of countries receiving pandas. Comparison of the situation might lead to unexpected results and improve the understanding of a country's relations with China. The following countries, which are currently renting pandas can be the subject for future research: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Russia, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Kingdom (Scotland), and the United States. The most suitable countries for the comparison are Netherlands and their pandas Xing Ya and Wu Wen living in Ouwehands Dierenpark, who have recently gave birth to a cub; Spain and the Zoo Aquarium, in Madrid, which is the home of Bing Xing and Hua Zuiba since 2007, who as gave birth to 3

cubs over the past 10 years; and Belgium Zoo Pairi Daiza, which hosts a family of five giant pandas. All these are examples of successful panda-breeding cooperation between the countries.

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Appendix 1



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